was kicked off and Government have already spent Rs. 100 crore, but no one in the department knows about its progress; and

(c) if so, the reasons therefor and the action proposed thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI S.S. PALANIMANICKAM): (a) to (c) Comprehensive Computerisation in the Income Tax Department which was initiated in year 1994-95 is an ongoing project. The creation of a nationwide network is one of its components. The Department has made considerable progress, *inter-alia,* in the allotment of permanent account number (PAN), tax accounting, processing of returns, filing of TDS returns and annual information returns (AIR). One of the recent successful initiatives has been compulsory electronic filing of return by corporate taxpayers.

As regards networking, initially, 60 cities of the country were networked on leased line basis technology. Subsequent to this initiative, it was decided to establish a single national data base whereby other 450 cities would also be put on the network. For this purpose, Internet Protocol based Virtual Private Network (IP-VPN) technology was adopted and a contract was entered with M/s Bharti Airtel Ltd. on 28.10.2005 for connecting 745 buildings of the Income Tax Department located in 510 cities (including 60 cities which were earlier networked on leased line basis). 219 buildings in 60 cities have already been networked under the new system. Another 43 cities would be on network by 31st December, 2006. More cities would also be on network in the coming months.

For the purpose of networking, Income Tax Department, has so far paid a sum of Rs. 19.83 crores to M/s Bharti Airtel Ltd. out of total sum of Rs. 240 crores (excluding Service Tax) to be paid over a period of five years.

Services set up by Banking Codes Board

2200. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Banking Codes and Standards Board of India has enrolled 52 commercial banks that account for nearly 93 per cent of the banking business;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the banking Codes Board is created by RBI and sets minimum standards of banking practices for banks to follow while dealing with individual customers; and

(c) if so, the details of the benchmark of services set up by Banking Codes Board?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI PAWAN KUMAR BANSAL): (a) to (c) The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) together with 11 other banks in India set up the Banking Codes and Standards Board of India (BCSBI) in February, 2006 to monitor and ensure that banking codes and standards voluntarily adopted by banks are adhered to, in letter and spirit, while providing services to individual customers.

As per the information furnished by RBI, the BCSBI has approved the membership of 60 schedule commercial banks, which cover more than 98% of the branch network of commercial banks in India.

The Code of Bank's Commitment to Customers (Code) evolved by BCSBI in consultation with the banking industry sets out minimum standards of banking practices for banks to follow and emphasizes transparency in Banks' dealings with its customers. To achieve the avowed transparency, it provides for documentation of banks' fees and service charges in the form of a Tariff Schedule and requires banks to set out a cheque collection policy, compensation policy and a security repossession policy. The Code lays great emphasis on providing full information to the customer before a product or service is sold to him. For post sale conduct, the code insists on banks giving one month's notice to customer before making any change in their tariff schedule or any change in terms and conditions governing the product, which may adversely affect the customer. The detailed Code is available on the BCSBI website (http://www.bcsbi.org.in).

Essential Commodities Act to check hoarding

2201. PROF. ALKA BALRAM KSHATRIYA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether with essential food items like wheat and pulses getting costlier, Government have decided to invoke the Essential Commodities Act to check hoarding, the single biggest factor responsible for the price rise;